

highlights the formidable task of giving up one's emotional and familial safety to allow for mutual growth. In this case, the road leads both mother and daughter to acceptance and hope.

## **The Pearl of the Antilles**

Andrea O'Reilly Herrera

Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Review Press, 2001

### **Reviewed by Gillian M. E. Albans**

In this powerful semi-autobiographical memoir of a survivor of Cuba's diaspora, Andrea O'Reilly Herrera deftly explores inter-generational and -sexual tensions within pre-communist Cuba, a country splintered by revolution and death. The second part of the memoir continues in exile in Alabama and reaches back to the Spanish heritage of the Cuban colonists. The work moves across three generations of women—Rosa, her daughter Margarita, and her granddaughter Lilly—as well as the old family retainer Tata, Rosa's husband Pedro, and the original colonist Paolo.

The memoir opens as Tata experiences a mountain-top vision of the July festival of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the Virgin, on her hieratic journey to the sea. The vision transforms into a nightmarish view of the priest taking children from their mothers and stripping the men of their virility. It is this view that hovers ominously over the memoir. In this patriarchal society, the absolute value of the male is reinforced by the family's failure over three generations to produce legitimate male offspring. An illegitimate son has no familial value and becomes a source of shame. In a stifling atmosphere transported from the old world, societal inequalities are perpetuated as much by women as men. A daughter-in-law, for example, is complete disregarded by her mother-in-law, despite the fact that her son is transformed as a husband, father, and inheritor of his wife's plantation.

Conversations in drawing rooms and servants' kitchens dominate these leisured women's lives. The default language between sexes and generations is silence, however. Marital partners use silence as a weapon against one another, for example. Yet communication occurs between Rosa and Pedro, at times between the mother who revisits her daughter Rosa from beyond the grave, or when Rosa refuses to explain the facts of life to her daughter Margarita, but joins her in spirit as a shared look offers them a secret tryst.

There are also strikingly rebellious female figures in this traditional society. The feisty Tia Marta on her quinceañera, for instance, parades down the stairs

naked, wearing pearls and her father's riding boots, and thereby achieves her intended aim of escaping marriage. Only the nunnery offers escape from the inevitable fate of a loveless marriage and the risks of childbirth.

Passing through the landmarks of birth, first periods and first loves, communions, weddings and death, the family home is the rich base from which characters step out into the street, cathedral, or plantation. The pearls threading through their lives are the stories woven into the fabric of this compelling family saga. The protagonist Rosa is herself the eponymous pearl of the Antilles. It is the servant Tata who gives Rosa the notebook in which she records stories for her children, in order to retain more than "a heap of broken images and songs and a path of unhewn stones" (145). These stories will eventually link Rosa's life to that of her daughter and her granddaughter—even if Spanish, the language in which she writes, will later create a barrier to understanding.

By the time the young Margarita leaves for the United States—at extraordinary personal cost—she has learned too well the lessons of silence and endurance. It takes years before her lonely suffering subsides and she opens to a future of exciting possibilities for herself and her daughter. Despite her own suffering, however, she does not regard her daughter as highly as her son. Sadly, the memoir suggests that women do not value one another as much as they value men.

History looms behind the human drama of this memoir. Andrea O'Reilly Herrera examines lives spent in the service of an inimicable ideology; she exposes the tantalizing hold of the ever-receding past and the shaping power of sorrow and love. This is a book to be valued for its portrayal of both the ephemeral and the eternal, for its rich collage of a too readily forgotten past.

## The End of Second Class

Nancy Nicol

© 2006 Intervention Video Inc. (90 min., DVD)

### Reviewed by Deidre Hill Butler

Same-sex marriage was legalized in Canada as a result of provincial court rulings that deemed unconstitutional existing bans on same-sex marriage. In fact, the legal status of same-sex marriage was unclear until 19 March 2004 when the Court of Appeal of Quebec ruled similarly to the Ontario and British Columbia courts by upholding *Hendricks and Leboeuf v. Quebec*, the first case in Quebec concerning the marriage of a same-sex couple.

In *The End of Second Class*, filmmaker Nancy Nicol brings a human rights and social justice perspective to her chronicle of the struggle for full equality for

same-sex unions in Canada. In-depth interviews with Hendricks and Leboeuf explore how their relationship was a traditional marriage in every way, shedding light on the need for same-sex unions to be legally recognized. This couple of thirty-plus years became the poster couple for an ongoing movement to shatter the invisible status of same-sex couples. While other lawsuits loomed, Hendricks and Leboeuf set the legal tide in motion.

Nicol's film is candid and detailed about the challenges gay and lesbian couples faced while battling for legal recognition. Through interviews with legal advisors and clergy, the viewer learns about the intermingling of church and state politics from macro and micro perspectives. Nicol highlights a wide range of individuals, including feminists, life-long activists, and grannylesbians, who combated legal obstacles as they worked toward their goal of legalizing same-sex marriage. Although the film lacks depth, it is informative and well suited to an upper-level undergraduate or graduate course in sociology of the family, for example. Community groups may also be interested in utilizing the documentary as an instructive model for building multi-layered alliances.